

FAST-TRACKERS



Photo by Danny Ramirez

Gerry & Margarita Licon

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— Gerry Licon

by Larac Malooly
El Paso Inc. correspondent

Even though Licon Engineering Company Inc. is locally owned, their handiwork is everywhere: within the foundation beneath the Plaza Theatre’s new additions, in the plans of the recently approved Fabens international port of entry and amidst government structures at Big Bend National Park.

Success. That’s what happens when a husband and wife engineering team offers the region rare services like environmental regulatory compliance, geo-technical engineering and construction quality control.

Gerry Licon, 39, is Licon Engineering’s vice president and answers to wife Margarita Licon, 42, the president of the company not quite two years old – the first engineering firm of its kind owned by a Hispanic female.

They met in the late-1980s while earning their bachelors of science in civil engineering at UTEP.

“I always liked construction and I always liked building things and the challenge of problem solving,” Gerry (an El Paso native) cited as his reason for pursuing engineering.

“My father is a civil engi-

neer,” Margarita says. “I remember growing up as a little girl at the construction site. I loved it.” She describes her days growing up in Brownsville and Matamoros. “I always was good in math. I enjoyed sitting down and working a problem.”

After years of friendship as students, romance fit into the equation.

“My parents pushed me to go to college, but they always said nobody can bring a boyfriend to the house before they can bring home a college degree,” Margarita said.

So she had a degree under one arm and Gerry on the other when he met her parents for the first time and asked for her hand. The two married in 1987. While raising children and working full time, they also got their masters in civil engineering together at UTEP.

While Gerry worked in the private sector, Margarita honed her skills at the International Boundary and Water Commission and the City’s engineering department. It was a good combination for starting a business.

“The winning combination is she is a visionary. She dreams and sees things ahead that I don’t see, and I come in and implement them,” Gerry said.

“Starting a business is not easy. It can really divide. A

relationship needs to be stable before getting into a business. Yet this business has really united us and bound us more,” Margarita added.

A household run by two engineers is very scheduled and organized – leading to debates about how to design the sprinkler system in the backyard. But any discord is forgotten by the time the Licons get to work in the morning to show their 20 employees what teamwork really is.

With superhuman patience and will, Margarita deals with federal and state agencies for the regulatory compliance associated with their environmental consulting services. Gerry is a master at putting data together (such as soil and water samples), analyzing it and submitting it to partnering companies.

Among many benefits to working at the same place, Gerry and Margarita help each other make time for their math-and-science-loving children: 15-year-old Marcela, 12-year-old Gerry and 10-year-old Bianca.

Margarita is an advisory member on the UTEP Department of Civil Engineering, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Society of Professional Engineers. Gerry

is a member of the UTEP College of Engineering board, chairman-elect of the Greater El Paso Chamber of Commerce’s Government Relations Division, El Paso Symphony Orchestra Board of Trustees and the advisory council for United Blood Services.

Together, the couple helped found the Alumni Academy of Civil Engineers to support their old department and provide scholarships. They also teach Bible study in Spanish to people living in public housing developments across town at the Abundant Living Faith Center.

Meanwhile, Licon Engineering is rapidly growing, having completed 200 projects by the end of year one and hitting the 350 mark so far this year. As they accrue more federal government contracts, the company is moving to a larger location in Central El Paso.

“We want to become a national company,” Gerry said, in hopes of prospering from the defense-related industry and high technology he sees evolving locally. “Some companies are looking to be established in Mexico. Who better to help them than us?”

“No matter what, the headquarters will always be in El Paso,” Margarita added.